

Stephen Levine and Raj Vasil, *Maori Political Perspectives: He Whakaaro Māori Mō Ngā Ti Kanga Kāwanatanga*. Auckland: Hutchinson of New Zealand, 1985. Pp. 206, appendixes, further reading. NZ\$15.95 paper.

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In an article written for the *New Zealand Listener* in March 1980, Ken Piddington, former director of the New Zealand Council and now commissioner for the environment, addresses the "puzzled Pakeha":<sup>1</sup> "I meet a lot of people who ask what is special about the place of the Maori view in any plan for the future of New Zealand. Sometimes they are not even clear whether it should be accepted as a separate view. Although racial issues are now being stated much more bluntly there is still a lingering reluctance to accept that a Maori view of the New Zealand scene can be so different" (20). Toward the end of 1979 Piddington worked on

*He Matapuna*, a Planning Council publication in which several leading Maori thinkers were invited "to say it the way they saw it" (20). His article explains Maori demands for greater autonomy in New Zealand and suggests some ways in which those demands can be met. For example, he suggests to the Pakeha that "they can accept the reassertion of Maoritanga as one important and continuing strand in the fabric of New Zealand's national identity" (21).

Stephen Levine and Raj Vasil's *Maori Political Perspectives: He Whakaaro Māori Mō Ngā Ti Kāinga Kāwanatanga* is a book-length presentation of those same Maori needs for autonomy presented not only by leading thinkers, but through the voices of Maoris from all walks of life, and addressed to those same puzzled Pakehas. In acknowledging the familiarity of what they say to a Maori audience--"They are, after all, more aware of their situation than we are" (10)--the authors admit to writing for a Pakeha audience in order to show the diversity of political perspectives within Maoridom, the quality of thinking, and the depth of commitment to articulating a distinctive Maori presence in New Zealand society. "It is to this end--a politics based on the fact of Maori aspirations and grievances, and their accommodation, rather than the fantasy of a harmonious ethnically homogeneous society--that this study is committed" (10). The authors also state that there "seems little point in glossing over the very clear fact that Maoris and Pakehas do not feel 'alike,' do not classify themselves together, whatever some may believe they *should* feel or think" (12). Levine and Vasil attempt to render the Maori politically visible to the Pakeha.

The authors note the limitations of mainstream political science in answering the race relations crisis facing New Zealand in the 1980s. In so doing, they seem to acknowledge the limitations of the scientific bent of political studies by relying upon informal, in-depth interviews--"conversations"--with Maori speakers of diverse viewpoints and backgrounds who address us in their own voices. They were not chosen as representative sample; thirty of the main participants are selected and contextualized for us in admittedly impressionistic "character studies" in appendix 1. The studies identify personality, political party affiliation, religious affiliation, gender, occupation, residence (urban, rural, North Island, South Island), and ideological perspective (feminist, separatist, etc.), but the descriptions provided are not equally detailed or parallel for each individual. Given the significant role of young radical women in the Maori separatist movement, I was surprised not to find portrait of such an individual, although some of the informants did comment on the role of young urban feminist radicals. <sup>2</sup> We are not told

how many people in total were spoken to, but that the number was "fairly small." Nor are the specific questions asked of these informants included except within the transcribed texts of certain speakers and from context. It is not clear if the same questions were asked of all informants, or to what degree the interviews were open-ended.

Each chapter begins with a series of quotations selected by a Maori reader to reflect its main points. In chapter 1, "The Political Context," the authors assert the need to accept and support a separate identity for the Maori people. The Maori need not only a share of the country's wealth and a political role and voice, but also symbolic recognition as an indigenous people. They summarize the attitudes of the major New Zealand parties-- Labour, National, Social Credit, and the New Zealand party--toward Maori issues and suggest that political science in New Zealand has limited its notion of Maori politics to the four Maori seats in Parliament. Maori notions of politics are far broader, however, and the questions asked elicit what contemporary Maori political culture includes, what Maori attitudes toward the four seats and other institutions might be, and what Maoris want from Pakehas. The strength of the chapter reflects the strength of the book as whole--the compelling evidence that politics, its institutions, role, and the solutions it can offer need to be conceptualized in Maori terms. A multiplicity of indigenous perceptions of politics, in which the consensus- and *marae*-based nature of politics emerges as shared among Maoris, are voiced in chapter 2, "Images of Politics," written in primarily Maori voices.

Separate Maori political institutions are the focus of chapter 3, not only formal political institutions such as the Maori seats, the Maori Affairs Department, and its statutory bodies, but also cultural institutions that present an alternative direction free of government. These include Tu Tangata ("To Recognize the Stance of the People"), which stresses the worth of Maori culture independently of government, the Mana Motuhake party, and organizations within Maori community life--voluntary associations, trust boards administering Maori tribal trusts, and *marae* political institutions. Here Levine and Vasil trace the historical development of Maori political institutions from the Treaty of Waitangi to present bodies such as the Maori Council and the Maori Land Court with clarity, detail, and superb integration of informant narrative.

The authors ask mainstream political science scholarship to acknowledge alternative Maori political structures and not to take Pakeha academic perspectives or the assumption of Pakeha culture as the norm. They strive to present an indigenous conception of politics but fall short,

presenting for the most part Maori views of the New Zealand political system and the ways it diverges from some aspects of indigenous Maori politics. To do so adequately would have demanded a more concentrated focus on the integration of politics and religion in colonial and postcolonial Maori culture. This is the approach taken in the scholarship of Judith Binney (Binney, Chaplin, and Wallace 1979), Ranginui Walker (1984), and Peter Webster (1979) (cited in the book's further readings) who focus especially on the prophetic tradition. Walker explores the genesis of Maori activism in that tradition from the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840; he writes, "the history of Maori activism since that time has been characterized by a restless search to recover and reassert that lost sovereignty" (1984:269). Interestingly, Walker asserts that a "central myth-theme" in New Zealand society is racial harmony but its nonexistence has been problematic since 1840 "as the two races of vastly different cultural traditions competed for the land and its resources" (ibid.). Ultimately Walker asserts that the Maori dynamic of self-determinism has persisted historically through various transformations.

While Levine and Vasil present a range of Maori attitudes toward Maori and Pakeha leaders and parliamentary seats in separate voices often reflecting tribal affiliation, it is evident that attitudes toward various issues are closely related. "Maoris do feel that their situation in New Zealand is unique, that their interests and goals are distinctive, and that they require their own political leaders. Whether these leaders are chosen as they are now, in the same numbers and as part of the same institution, appears to be secondary. What seems paramount is that Maoris want leaders who are 'close to the people,' who are chosen by, from, among and for the Maori" (106). Several chapters point to complexity--there is no homogeneous Maori perspective on politics, but politics is necessary to preserve Maori cultural heritage and identity and its distinctiveness from Pakeha ideas about the Maori language, the educational system, economic development, and land. Ultimately, though, within the Maori community there is no clear consensus about the role of politics. "New political structures and redefined political symbols are not yet seen consistently as the most appropriate ways to express the Maori heritage and the pride that goes with it" (161).

Despite the lag between the collection of primary data (May to September 1980) and the publication of the volume (1985), the issues of land, language, culture, and self-determination (*mana motuhake*) for the Maori people that the authors address are as salient today, if not more so, as ever before. In their connecting analyses, concluding chapter, and the appendixes (the "Recommendations of the National Hui on

the Treaty of Waitangi" in September 1984, "Extracts from the Report of the Waitangi Tribunal" in March 1983, and the final communique from the Maori Economic Development Summit Conference in 1984), Levine and Vasil incorporate political events and changes occurring in New Zealand in the interim. These include the Labour landslide of 1984 and the appointment of two Maori members of Parliament to Cabinet positions, the revival of the Pacific Affairs portfolio, the establishment of Maori International, the effects of the 1981 Springbok tour, the introduction of the new Maori language syllabus to schools, and the establishment of *kohanga reo* (language nests).

In conclusion the authors write that "the Maori challenge to the political system is so profound, and of such dimensions, that any set of priorities which does not address the Maori's place in the New Zealand system, urgently and intelligently, must be mistaken. Nor are Maori aspirations so intractable that, in our view, they cannot be constructively resolved" (166). The political system, the state, must create a society where Maori and Pakeha can coexist in conditions of equality while maintaining their separate cultural traditions. They suggest that comparative political inquiry in Vanuatu, Hawaii, Australia, and other Pacific nations may provide some solutions. As Ken Piddington so insightfully wrote in 1980, "New Zealanders are forcibly reminded that the historical period of world-wide European dominance is drawing to a close" (21). The issues addressed here are of global proportions.

## NOTES

1. Pakeha is the Maori term for white New Zealanders, those of European ancestry, as distinct from Maori ancestry.

2. As an example, Donna Awatere comes to mind. Quite possibly, such radicals, concerned with articulating Maori sovereignty rather than helping Pakehas to understand their own role in denying Maori self-determination, refused to speak to the researchers. In her book she writes: "Sharing that knowledge [about the Maori world] with *our* children is surely a priority" (Awatere 1984:95). Maori knowledge as a "treasure" is often "written down in a way readable only by the white academic world." Levine and Vasil say that they sought a better understanding of a Maori political resurgence from those who would share, implying that not all would.

## REFERENCES

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